IDEAS AT *Work*

COMPUTERS / HILLEL SEGAL

'File Minder' brings order to old floppies

There's a free and easy way to locate files on personal computer disks. There's also a $69.95 method called "File Minder" for people too lazy to use the free and easy way.

It's offered by Finch Inc. of Frederick, Md., and is intended for use with IBM PCs and PC-compatible computers. The authors makes no bones about who they're targeting: computer users with dozens of floppy disks and hundreds of files who need help organizing them. Their advertisement, for example, depicts a large stack of floppy disks with the caption: "Somewhere on these floppies is the greatest idea you ever had."

Segal

The problem rings true, because almost everyone who uses a personal computer has been in situations where it was difficult and time-consuming to find an old file, an old spreadsheet, or an old word processing document.

Once you've acquired File Minder, finding old files that contain specific information is a breeze, regardless of the actual name of the file. Here's how it's done:

✔ First, you load the program and indicate which directory or disk you wish to search. By pressing the "F1" key on your keyboard, all the File Minder commands appear. The manual isn't needed.

✔ Second, you enter a unique name or character-string that's contained in the file you're searching for. If, for example, I was looking for this article on my disk containing all newspaper articles, I'd simply type "File Minder." The program quickly scans the contents of all my files until it finds the character string, and it puts an asterisk next to each file name.

✔ Finally, I could move the cursor to the name of each file name that's been flagged with the asterisk and press "v" to view the contents of the file and verify that it's the one I'm looking for.

That's all there is to it. The more files on the disk, the more valuable the program becomes, because it cuts down on the search of all those files. I also tested several other functions that are contained in the program — for copying, renaming and reorganizing files — but these are easily accomplished using the normal DOS commands that come with your computer. The main value of the program is the quick search feature.

The main reasons people "lose" their computer files is that they don't bother to set up and use directories and subdirectories on their hard disk and floppies, and don't bother to use distinctive file names.

By using the "make directory" and "change directory" commands every day, you can easily set up directories and put all your files that pertain to a subject together.

To make a new directory, you just type "mdname" where "name" is the name of your new directory. Then, to enter the directory at any time, just type "cdname" where "cd" stands for change directory. All the details are contained in the DOS manual that comes with your computer.

And by creatively giving each file a unique file name, it's easy to tell your individual files apart. Using the eight plus three characters available, your names might become "SMITH.LTR" for your letter to Mr. Smith, "CUSTOMER.DB" for your customer data base, and "2ND.QTR" for your second-quarter spreadsheet.

With the two techniques used together, there would be little reason to ever need the File Minder program. You could easily scan your directory names to see where a file is likely to be.

So why was File Minder developed? Because there are times when you must search and organize large numbers of files that are unorganized.

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